



DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

For Your Information...

Recycling 101

What is recycling? Recycling is placing your recyclables into the recycling bin or taking them to a drop-off center.

Well, there's a little more to it than that.

Recycling is a three-step process. The first step is collection – that's when you put your recyclables into the bin or take them to a drop-off center. The second step is manufacturing – that's when the recyclables are processed into raw materials that are manufactured into new products. The third step is buying recycled. You are not really recycling unless you are buying recycled content products.

You have seen the recycling symbol, right? You know, the three chasing arrows? The three arrows represent the three steps that complete the recycling loop.

Why should you recycle?

Recycling has many economic as well as environmental benefits.

First, recycling turns materials that otherwise would become waste into valuable resources. That's right – recyclables have value. The recyclables you place in the bin or take to the drop-off center end up on the market as commodities that are bought and sold.

Recyclables, in fact, make up an essential part of today's marketplace. Nationwide, the recycling industry contributes more than 1.1 million jobs in 56,000 businesses with more than \$236 million in gross annual sales according to a recent study. A 2004 study done by the S.C. Recycling Market Development Advisory Council shows that recycling companies employ about 20,000 people in South Carolina with an estimated payroll of \$712 million.

Recycling reduces the need to build landfills and incinerators. Recycling conserves natural resources as well as energy. Recycling reduces pollution caused by the extraction and processing of virgin materials and the manufacturing of products using virgin materials. (To learn more about why we should recycle, see Economic and Environmental Benefits of Recycling For Your Information fact sheet.)

Recycling works.

Recycling, in fact, is one of the nation's best environmental success stories. Overall, Americans recycled about 68 million tons of materials in 2001 (the latest year figures are available) – more than double the amount recycled in 1990 according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

South Carolinians recycled more than 1.31 million tons of materials in fiscal year (FY) 2003 (July 1, 2002 - June 30, 2003) and more than 7.7 million tons of materials since FY 1998. (To learn more about recycling totals and recycling goals, see "Recycling 102" For Your Information fact sheet.)

What do we recycle?

The most common materials collected for recycling include cardboard boxes, newspapers, steel (food and soup) cans, aluminum cans, plastic bottles, glass bottles and yard trimmings.

How do you know what is recycled in your community or where? Each of South Carolina's 46 counties and some municipalities have a recycling coordinator who can answer your questions. Look in the telephone book for your public works director, solid waste director or recycling coordinator. You also can call the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) Office of Solid Waste Reduction



and Recycling at **1-800-768-7348** or visit www.scdhec.gov/recycle/html/counties.html for information about local programs throughout the state.

Where do we recycle?

In South Carolina, 384,800 households had curbside collection of municipal solid waste (MSW) and recyclables through 126 curbside programs according to the "S.C. Solid Waste Management Annual Report for FY 2003." (To learn more about the total amount of MSW generated in South Carolina, see "Municipal Solid Waste 101" For Your Information fact sheet.)

Some counties and municipalities offered curbside collection of MSW only, serving 344,657 households, while others offered curbside collection of recyclables only, serving 36,100 households. About 988,757 households were served by 450 staffed drop-off or convenience centers. In addition, 243,589 households had access to 109 non-staffed drop-off or convenience centers around the state.

What happens to your recyclables after you recycle?

Well, they begin a circular journey. Here's the short version. After collection, materials are sorted by type, if needed, and contaminants removed. These materials may be baled and sold for processing. Manufacturers purchase these processed materials and make them into new recycled content products that they sell. There's where you come in again. You must buy recycled content products to make it all work. (To learn more about buying recycled, see "Buying Recycled" For Your Information fact sheet.)



One of the major criticisms of recycling is the cost. Recycling costs money, but so does the collecting and disposing of waste. How much does recycling cost? How does the cost of recycling compare to simply disposing of waste? Those are difficult questions to answer.

Communities can make money and avoid disposal costs by selling certain recyclables. But markets for recyclables fluctuate as markets do for all commodities. In short, the economic cost will vary from community to community based on local resources and the market demand for the recovered materials. And what about the environmental benefits of recycling? Analyzing all of these factors together helps local governments decide what they need to do – or not do – regarding recycling.

R-E-C-Y-C-L-E.

It begins with you and me.

Government, businesses, schools and consumers each play an important role in making recycling work. The role can vary from participating in collection programs, to making recycled content products and to buying those products.

Want more information?

Want to set up a program at your school or in your community? DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling is set up to provide education and awareness programs and materials, technical assistance and grant funding. Please call **1-800-768-7348** or visit www.scdhec.gov/recycle. For more information about your local recycling program, visit www.scdhec.gov/recycle/html/counties.html.



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1-800-768-7348
www.scdhec.gov/recycle

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